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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study surveyed 210 California State University at Northridge graduates who earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business education and wished to teach business courses in California public middle and secondary schools. They were asked to assess intended educational outcomes established by Department of Office Systems and Business Education faculty. Of 210 mailed questionnaires, 78 were returned; 50 provided usable data. Alumni identified four business courses that best prepared them for their first teaching position: accounting, technology, teaching methods, and communication; they indicated that statistics did not prepare them for their first teaching position. They suggested these courses would have helped prepare them for their career: a specialized course in technology and a methods course emphasizing tests and measurements, lesson planning, and classroom management. Although they had a favorable perception of the business education program, citing a relevant curriculum and knowledgeable professors, one indicated a need for more partnering with business and industry to provide students with opportunities to meet professionals, five recommended a methods course specific to business education and school administration, and two suggested that faculty and administrators in the colleges of business and education need to communicate effectively. As a result of this study, an assessment plan, including a revised survey, was developed. (The paper contains 10 references and the following appendices: Business Education Program Assessment Plan, with mission statement, goal statement, intended program outcomes, and assessment criteria and procedures; and survey.) (YLB)

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ASSESSMENT OF THE BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAM BY ALUMNI

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An Assessment of the Business Education Program by Alumni

As institutions of higher learning seek accreditation or reaccreditation, a way for administrators and faculty to evaluate their educational programs needs to be developed and implemented. Accrediting agencies are holding educational institutions accountable by requiring them to assess students' outcomes.

A major responsibility of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing is to adopt a framework and general standards for the accreditation of teacher preparation programs. These programs are assessed periodically by the Committee on Accreditation to determine whether teacher preparation institutions and programs meet the Commission's standards for initial and continuing accreditation. The Commission's most important responsibility is to establish and implement strong, effective standards of quality for the preparation and assessment of future teachers (Commission, 1995).

A teacher preparation program for those who wish to teach business courses in California public middle or secondary schools is offered by California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Generally, students complete courses offered by the College of Business Administration and Economics and the College of Education. For example, students demonstrate subject matter competence by completing courses from the College of Business Administration and Economics. Subsequently, they may earn a Single Subject Teaching Credential (issued through the Credential Office) by completing courses from the College of Education. To ensure this program continues to meet the Commission's standards, a student outcomes assessment plan should be in place.

Purpose of the Study

This study was undertaken to evaluate instructional effectiveness and student achievement of the business education program. Specifically, three problems were addressed:

1. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes should be measured?
2. How should students be measured?
3. When should evaluation be conducted?

The purpose of this study was to implement a student outcomes assessment plan for the business education program, in accordance with The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the University's Student Outcomes Assessment Policy.

Theoretical Model

The Institutional Effectiveness Paradigm (Nichols, 1991), which focuses on outcomes and is based on the behavioral objective approach to evaluation (Satterlee, 1992), was adopted by CSUN to help department liaisons develop assessment plans. This paradigm has four components: expanded statement of purpose, intended educational outcomes, assessment activities, and use of results. Goals, outcomes, and criteria are evaluated. Curriculum goals and objectives and student learning and development are considered during program assessment.

Method

Using this model, faculty in the Department of Office Systems and Business Education (OSBE) addressed the first two components by developing a mission statement and a goal statement and establishing intended educational outcomes (Appendix A). To assess these outcomes, a descriptive study was used to survey business education alumni.

The population comprises CSUN graduates who earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Education. Although the Development and Alumni Relations Office provided a database comprising the names and addresses of 210 graduates, it had not been updated and, therefore, did not reflect changes in the graduates' names or addresses.

To collect data, a questionnaire was developed to measure the intended educational outcomes and validated by a panel of experts (Parker & Drummond Reves, 1992; Hale & Travis, 1992; Annis & Rice, 1992). Survey research was used because it provides respondents with an opportunity for detached objectivity, enables their perceptions to be more reflective, permits them to differentiate between educational outcomes and environmental outcomes, and it allows them to measure long-term objectives (Parkyn, 1991).

During the spring 1998 semester, envelopes comprising a cover letter, a copy of the questionnaire, and a stamped, pre-addressed envelope were sent to business education alumni. One week later, a follow-up postcard was sent, two weeks later, another envelope comprising a cover letter, a copy of the questionnaire, and a stamped, pre-addressed envelope (Dillman, 1978; Carter, 1981).

Data were summarized and compared with established assessment criteria (Appendix A) to identify intended program outcomes that were met and those that required action.

Findings

Of the 210 questionnaires that were mailed, 78 of them were returned (37 percent response rate). Of these, only 50 provided usable data.

Alumni identified four business courses that best prepared them for their first teaching position: accounting, technology, teaching methods, and communication. On the other hand, alumni indicated that statistics did not prepare them for their first teaching position. When asked to list courses that would have helped prepare them for their career, alumni suggested a specialized course in technology and a methods course emphasizing tests and measurements, lesson planning, and classroom management.

Alumni experienced many challenges in their work: preparing for multiple courses (four to six), keeping pace with technology, motivating students, managing the classroom, dealing with parents, and working with administration. Specifically, alumni expressed concern about their students' incompetence and poor attitudes as well as the administration's support of lower standards.

Eighty percent of the business education alumni are either teaching in California's public school system or training in an organization. Alumni who were graduated in the 90s obtained teaching positions in business education. They reported teaching courses in accounting, computer applications, economics, keyboarding, and math.

After earning a Bachelor of Science in Business Education, 61 percent of the alumni obtained a teaching credential, 54 percent from CSUN. Furthermore, 51 percent of the alumni earned a master's degree; 43 percent from CSUN.

Alumni have a favorable perception of the business education program, citing a relevant curriculum and knowledgeable professors. They did, however, offer additional comments. For instance, one alumnus indicated a need for more partnering with business and industry to provide students with opportunities to meet professionals. Five alumni recommended a methods course specific to business education and school administration. Two alumni suggested that faculty and administrators in the colleges of business and education need to communicate effectively.

Only 25 percent of the alumni participated in student organizations such as the Business Equity Program, student government, and the California Business Education Association. In contrast, 61 percent currently belong to professional organizations such as the National Business Education Association, Western Business Education Association, Delta Pi Epsilon, and the Association of Records Managers and Administrators.

Discussion

Based on the findings, alumni seem somewhat concerned about the degree to which the business education program prepared them. For instance, they perceived the absence of a business education methods course and limited instruction concerning school culture as major weaknesses. Additionally, they believe that communication could be improved between business educators and faculty and administrators in the credential program, business professionals, and business teachers.

To enhance the business education program, OSBE faculty and administrators must establish and nurture relationships with those in the College of Education and middle and secondary school business programs. Students participate in courses offered by these two colleges and student teach in the community's middle and secondary schools. The curriculum must provide opportunities for students to acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills such as managing diverse groups of students. Moreover, faculty need to establish a business methods course or integrate such topics into an existing course, and either supervise or assist in supervising student teachers.

As a result of this study, an assessment plan, which includes a revised survey (Appendix B), has been developed. In 1999, only those alumni who graduated three years previously will be surveyed. Moreover, a current alumni database has been established; alumni can now be contacted for the purposes of advisement and development. The most important piece of this presentation would be sharing the assessment plan and survey.

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BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAM ASSESSMENT PLAN

Expanded Statement of Institutional Purpose

Mission Statement

The Mission of the program leading to the Bachelor of Science degree in Business Education supports the Missions of the College and of the University and is our commitment to excellence in teaching, research, and service. We provide the comprehensive background needed for students who wish to teach business and economics subjects in four kinds of educational environments: public and private secondary programs; public post-secondary programs; private post-secondary programs, and business and industry training programs. The Business Education program is also designed to meet the state of California requirements for a single subject credential in business. Our Mission also supports the commitment of the University to teacher education.

Goal Statement

All graduates of the Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Education will have developed a depth of understanding in business subjects and economics and been afforded the opportunity to prepare for a teaching career following graduation.

Intended Program Outcomes

Students completing the Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Education will

1. be well prepared for their first position in the field.
2. find ready employment in the field.
3. have a commitment to life-long learning.
4. Perceive their education as a positive experience.
5. assume leadership roles in the profession.

Assessment Criteria and Procedures

Just prior to graduation, business education faculty will interview students about the program. Three years after their graduation, alumni will complete the Business Education Survey. By this time, most of them will have obtained a teaching credential and teaching experience.

- 1a. Graduates will evaluate the business education courses on a Likert scale indicating the degree to which they prepared them for their career. If a course is rated "fair" or "poor" by more than ten percent of the alumni, telephone interviews will be conducted to solicit additional information about the effectiveness of the course.

- 1b. Based on two years of experience, graduates will be asked to identify any courses or topics that should have been included in the Business Education Program. Content areas that are identified by more than 40 percent of the graduates will be reviewed by the department for inclusion in current course content or possible new course development.
- 1c. Graduates will be asked to describe any challenges that they have experienced in their teaching over the past two years. Experiences that are similar and consistent will be reviewed by the department for potential topics or activities (role playing, case studies, etc.) in current courses.
- 2a. Ninety percent of the graduates will find ready employment teaching within a year of completing their credential program.
- 2b. Graduates will be surveyed about challenges that they experienced when seeking a position. This will keep the department aware of supply and demand trends as well as any barriers in the marketplace. Current students need to be made aware of market trends for career planning. Furthermore, the information will be important for recruitment efforts.
- 3a. Eighty percent of the Business Education graduates will complete their credential program, 50 percent at CSUN.
- 3b. Fifty percent of graduates will complete graduate work and 75 percent will complete training sessions in technology to keep up to date in the field.
- 4. Ninety percent of the students will view their education as a positive experience
- 5a. Fifty percent of the students will be involved of some type of on-campus club, organization, or association. Also, graduates will be asked to identify the types of activities or organizations that would have interested them. This information will be used for planning more student involvement.
- 5b. Eighty percent of graduates will be involved in professional organizations related to teaching and/or training.
- 5c. Fifty percent of the graduates will be willing to be involved in the Business Education Program as a guest speaker, panel member, or contact person for student observations and internships.

BUSINESS EDUCATION SURVEY

Education and Employment

1. If you are teaching in a school system or training in business, please fill out this questionnaire. If you are pursuing a career other than teaching or training, please list your employment history only.

Dates	Position	School/Organization
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

2. Indicate graduate work or technical training programs you have completed.

School	Year	Program/Major
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

3. Did you earn a single-subject credential? _____ Yes _____ No

If yes, indicate the school from which you earned your credential.

If you attended a school other than CSUN, please explain your reasons.

Program

4. Indicate how the following business education courses prepared you for your career.

Courses	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
101 Communications Technology I	_____	_____	_____	_____
201 Communications Technology II	_____	_____	_____	_____
205 Analysis of Communication for Bus	_____	_____	_____	_____
311 Office Administration Support Mgmt.	_____	_____	_____	_____
313 Administrative Office Management	_____	_____	_____	_____
314 Computer-Based Office Systems	_____	_____	_____	_____
413 Office Systems Analysis	_____	_____	_____	_____
414 Information Processing Management	_____	_____	_____	_____
415 Seminar in Bus. and Economic Educ.	_____	_____	_____	_____

5. Based on your teaching/training experiences, what courses or topics should have been included in the Business Education Program?

6. List on-campus clubs, organizations, and associations in which you participated.

7. What types of activities/organizations for business education majors would have interested you?

8. What is your overall impression of the Business Education Program? Please explain.

Experiences

9. List the subject areas you teach or have taught.

10. What extracurricular activities, special projects, curriculum development plans, etc. have you been assigned?

11. What challenges did you experience when seeking a position?

12. What challenges have you experienced in your work?

13. List professional organizations of which you are a member.

14. Would you be willing to be a guest speaker in our classes, be a member of an alumni panel, have a student observe you at work, or sponsor a student intern?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please provide a phone number where you can be reached _____

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your overall impression of the business education major?
2. In what professional activities did you participate while attending CSUN?
3. Describe related work experience you have.
4. What were your best educational experiences?
5. What were your worst educational experiences?
6. What would be your advice to students who wish to major in business education?